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PRRC emerging trends

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Religion Regains Public Confidence After Declining Last Year

The church or organized religion, which declined in Americans' esteem last year, has since registered an increase in public confidence, despite the TV evangelists scandal this spring. Nevertheless, it has failed to regain the primacy it enjoyed for many years as the nation's most trusted institution.

Currently, organized religion and the military share this distinction, with 61% expressing a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in each institution. In last year's assessment, 63% had a high degree of trust in the military while 57% were highly confident in the church. In seven earlier surveys the church was the top-rated institution tested, with the proportions having a great deal or quite a lot of confidence ranging from a high of 68% (in 1975) to a low of 62% (in 1983).

Consistent with the results of earlier surveys, Protestants, women, blacks, older Americans, Southerners, and the less well-educated currently express greater confidence in the church than do people from different socio-economic backgrounds. Comparison of the results of the 1986 and 1987 polls, however, shows marginal increases in confidence among all population groups, including those mentioned above.

The military is held in slightly higher trust by persons 50 and older, those whose formal education ended at the high school level, and, especially, self-described Republicans, 70% of whom give it one of the highest ratings.

Supreme Court Ranks Third

The U.S. Supreme Court is the third-highest rated institution, with 52% currently indicating a high level of confidence. Almost as many give highly favorable ratings to banks (51%) and the public schools (50%).

In the third tier of the institutions studied and the percentages saying they have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in each are: newspapers (31%), television (28%), and organized labor (26%).

With the exception of newspapers, which suffered a 6 percentage-point loss of public confidence, the latest findings are not statistically different from those obtained in last year's poll.

Here is the question and highlights of the trend:

I am going to read you a list of institutions in American society. Would you please tell me how much confidence you, yourself, have in each one — a great deal, quite a lot, some, or very little?

Confidence in Institutions
(Percent saying "great deal" or "quite a lot")

	1987	1986	1985	1983	1979
	%	%	%	%	%
Church or organized religion	61	57	66	62	65
Military	61	63	61	53	54
U.S. Supreme Court	52	53	56	42	45
Banks	51	49	51	51	60
Public schools	50	49	48	39	53
Newspapers	31	37	35	38	51
Television	28	27	29	25	38
Organized labor	26	29	28	26	36

The latest findings are based on in-person interviews with 1,607 adults, 18 and older, conducted in more than 300 scientifically selected localities across the nation during the period July 10-13.

For results based on samples of this size, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects should not exceed 3 percentage points in either direction. In addition to sampling error, the reader should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls. *This report conforms to the standards of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.*

Fewer Teens Today than in 1984 Say Religious Faith is Important

Less than half of teens say it is very important for people their age to develop religious faith (44 percent). By comparison, in 1984, 51 percent of teens believed religious faith was a very important personal quality, according to the latest Gallup Youth Survey.

"Competitiveness" is becoming a watchword for many adults, but fewer of America's teens than before believe that hard work is very important.

Although seven teens in 10 (70 percent) say hard work is a very important quality, this represents a significant drop since 1984, when 82 percent of all teens thought hard work was very important.

Other qualities have fared better, with about nine teens in 10 now saying they think it is very important for people their age to develop the qualities of responsibility (89 percent), honesty (89 percent), and self-respect (87 percent).

Majorities of teens believe it is very important to develop the qualities of independence (65 percent), patience (61 percent), and obedience (60 percent).

Belief in hard work as a very important quality is higher in large cities (78 percent) than in the suburbs (69 percent) or rural areas (66 percent). Appropriately, the importance of the Protestant work ethic is higher among Protestant teens (73 percent) than among Catholic youth (66 percent). The results of hard work may be in evidence already, with above-average students (72 percent) more often saying it is very important than is true for those whose academic work is just average or below average (66 percent). Regionally, belief in hard work is lowest in the East (65 percent) and highest in the South (72 percent).

Honesty and responsibility are qualities that rank high in importance among teens from all demographic strata and regions. Self-respect is also a trait that is highly valued by most teens, but especially by young women (90 percent), teens who are 16 or older (90 percent), and teens living in the West (93 percent).

Independence is of more importance to younger teens (69 percent) than to those who are older (60 percent). Surprisingly, only a bare majority of teens living in the West (53 percent) consider independence to be a very important quality for people their age. Teens living in large cities (72 percent) prize independence more often than do those living in the suburbs (64 percent) or rural areas (63 percent).

Patience is more often named as being very important by young women (64 percent) than by young men (59 percent).

A majority of Protestant teens (52 percent) consider religious faith to be a very important quality, but only 37 percent of the Catholic teens share this view. As would be expected, teens who attend church regularly (59 percent) are far more likely than those who do not (25 percent) to say that religious faith is an important quality. The importance of religious faith is highest in the Bible Belt states of the South (59 percent) and Midwest (42 percent), and lowest in the West (38 percent) and East (32 percent).

Here is how the question was asked:

How important — very important, fairly important, or not so important — do you think it is for a person your age to learn each of the following personal qualities?

The findings reported today are based on telephone interviews with a representative national cross section of 503 teen-agers, 13 through 17, conducted in the period of March 20-30, 1987.

Prayer, Bible Reading Cited Often As Ways to Beat Depression

When depressed or discouraged, Americans most frequently turn to a hobby, watch television, read, or listen to music to try to overcome the blues.

Cited next most often by a national sample of adults, interviewed in a new Gallup study for the Christian Broadcasting Network, are seeking out friends or family members with whom to talk, eating more or eating less, and spending more time in prayer, meditation, and in reading the Bible.

Then follow these ways to deal with depression or discouragement: spending more time in exercise, shopping more, and spending more hours at work.

Next are: seeking out a member of the clergy, spending more time sleeping, and seeking help from a doctor or a professional counsellor.

Cited least frequently (from a list of 13 steps), but by a significant number of people, are: drinking more alcohol, and relying more heavily on medication.

Which Steps Are Most Effective?

On the key question of which of these steps is most effective in dealing with depression or discouragement, prayer, meditation, reading the Bible, and exercise come out on top.

These steps are followed by: seeking out friends or family members, and seeking out a priest, rabbi, or pastor.

Next are: spending more hours on the job, and seeking help from a doctor or counsellor. These are followed by: spending more time sleeping and relying more on medication.

Found least effective by those who turn first to these steps to deal with depression or discouragement are: shopping more, changing eating habits, and drinking more alcohol.

These are among the key findings from a major survey on depression and discouragement, conducted last fall and released here for the first time. In the survey, a sample of 1,007 adults, 18 and older, were interviewed by telephone during the period October 27 – November 24. The survey also found that:

- Ten percent of adults find themselves depressed or discouraged most of the time or quite often, while 44% say occasionally, and 26% say almost never or never. Women are slightly more likely than men to say they find themselves depressed or discouraged most of the time or quite often. Young adults (18-29) are more inclined to give these responses than are older persons.

Income and level of formal education are strong factors. Persons in lower income groups and those with little formal education are the most likely to feel depressed or discouraged on a frequent basis.

- Of those who feel depressed or discouraged at least on occasion (81%) — that is, excluding the 19% who say "never" — 2% say their periods of depression or discouragement tend to last "very long." Another 9% say "fairly long," while 87% indicate "not at all long."

Looking at those who say either "very" or "fairly long," we find little difference in the responses of men and women, but a higher proportion of younger than older adults, and a higher proportion of non-whites than whites, give these responses.

Duration of depression, as with frequency, is closely related to income levels and levels of formal education.

- Money and bills, one's job and problems at work, family problems, and worry about health are volunteered most frequently (by the 81% who at least on occasion have a period of feeling depressed or discouraged) as some of the things that cause them to feel discouraged or depressed.

- Next most frequently volunteered are: life in general/ frustrations, problems with children, state of the economy, world affairs, and one's social life.

- The 81% who are ever depressed or discouraged were asked how frequently they engage in 13 activities as a way to deal with this depression or discouragement. Each person who engaged in a particular activity frequently or occasionally was then asked how effective he or she found this activity in overcoming feelings of depression or discouragement. The table on page 4 shows the proportions who cite each activity and its effectiveness.

Majority of Teens Approve of School Prayer

While their elders debate the issue, a majority of the nation's teens say they support prayer in the schools. Only a few teen-agers, however, report that a regular time is now set aside for prayers in the school they attend.

The issue of school prayer has been hotly debated since the 1962 Supreme Court ruling that organized prayer in public schools is not permissible under the First Amendment. President Reagan and many others have repeatedly called for a Constitutional Amendment to allow school prayer since that time.

Favoring a time for prayer in school are 55 percent of the nation's teens. Opposed to the idea are 31 percent, and 14 percent are undecided about the matter. Support for school prayer may be weakening somewhat, since the idea was favored by 60 percent of the teens in 1985. Other Gallup surveys in 1985 found even greater support for school prayer among adults, with 69 percent favoring the idea.

Younger teens are more likely than their older brothers and sisters to favor school prayer. The proposition is favored by 61 percent of those who are 13 to 15 years of age, but fails to gain majority support from teens who are 16 or older. Among the older teens, 47 percent say they would like to see a regular time set aside for prayer, 41 percent are opposed to the idea, and 12 percent hold no opinion on the matter.

Strongest support for school prayer is found among teens in the South where seven in 10 teens are in favor of the idea, and only 17 percent are opposed. Barely half of the teens in the East and Midwest (50 percent, each) support school prayer. In the West, those who are opposed to prayer in schools (46 percent) edge out supporters (45 percent) by a slim margin.

Stronger support for school prayer is found in large cities (59 percent) and among teens living in small towns and rural areas (56 percent) than in the suburbs (51 percent).

As might be expected, teens attending church regularly are more likely than those who do not to say they would like to see prayer in the schools, by a margin of 66 percent to 45 percent.

Support for school prayer is equal among both Catholic and Protestant teens, with 57 percent of each denomination saying they would like to see a regular time set for it.

Currently, only 15 percent of the teens say there is now a regular time set aside for prayer in the schools they attend. This is slightly lower than the 19 percent reported in 1985.

School prayers are reported by 22 percent of the Catholic teens, but by only 14 percent of Protestant youth. The highest incidence of school prayer is now found in the South (19 percent) and East (18 percent), the lowest in the Midwest (11 percent), and West (9 percent). These figures undoubtedly reflect the higher incidence of Catholic parochial schools in the East, and private Christian schools in the South in which school prayer is permitted.

Here is how the questions were asked:

Is there a regular time set aside for prayers in the school you attend?

Do you favor or oppose prayer in the schools?

The findings reported today are based on telephone interviews with a representative national cross section of 509 teen-agers, 13 through 17, conducted in the period of June 21-27, 1987.

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What Do Americans Do for Depression — And How Effective Are These Steps?
(Results based on the 81% who are ever depressed or discouraged)

	Frequently or occasionally engage in these activites	Very or somewhat effective
	%	%
1. Spend more time alone, with a hobby, TV, reading, or listening to music	77	84
2. Seek out friends to talk with	68	90
3. Seek out family members to talk with	66	88
4. Eat more/eat less	64	31
5. Spend more time in prayer, meditation or reading the Bible	48	94
6. Spend more time exercising	40	92
7. Shop more, spend money	31	47
8. Spend more hours at work	29	77
9. Seek out pastor, religious leader	27	87
10. Spend more time sleeping	26	59
11. Seek help from a doctor or professional counselor	14	71
12. Drink more alcohol	10	37
13. Rely more heavily on medication	6	58

Large Majorities Willing to Vote for Woman, Jew, or Black for President

One of the most dramatic political developments in the last three decades has been the public's growing willingness to say they would vote for a well-qualified woman, Jew, or black for president.

In 1958, 52% said they would vote for their party's presidential nominee if she was a woman; currently 82% express the same view.

During the same period, Americans' stated willingness to vote for a qualified black man for president has grown from 38% in 1958 to 79% today.

In 1958, 62% said they would support a Jewish candidate; today the figure is 89%.

Atheist Not Acceptable to Many

While the barriers of sex, race, and religious affiliation have fallen sharply in the last generation, not all political discrimination has disappeared. Only 44% in the latest survey, for instance, say they would be willing to vote for an atheist for president. However, the concept of an atheist in the White House is far more acceptable now than it was in 1958, when only 18% indicated they would back an atheist for president.

Despite the dramatic long-term decline in political prejudice, recent progress has been modest — in the case of a female or Jewish candidate — or negligible — for a black or atheist nominee. A decade ago, almost as many said they would be willing to support a woman (76%) or a Jew (82%) for president as do so now.

In Gallup's first (1937) assessment of public opinion on this issue, 31% said they would vote for a qualified woman for president.

Following are the questions asked and highlights of the trends:

Between now and the 1988 political conventions, there will be discussion about the qualifications of presidential candidates — their education, age, religion, race, and so on.

If your party nominated a generally well-qualified man for president and he happened to be a Jew, would you vote for him? . . . If he happened to be an atheist? . . . If he happened to be black?

If your party nominated a woman for president, would you vote for her if she were qualified for the job?

Woman, Minority Group Member for President
(Percent who would vote for each)

	Woman	Jew	Black	Atheist
	%	%	%	%
1987	82	89	79	44
1983	80	88	77	42
1978	76	82	77	40
1958	52	62	38	18

As shown in the following table, large majorities in all major population groups indicate support for a woman, a Jew, or a black nominee. On the whole, slightly less public backing is expressed by older Americans, the less well-educated, and, to a minor degree, Southerners, than by those from different backgrounds. These differences are more pronounced in the case of a black or atheist for president. Also, blacks in the survey are far less likely than whites to say they would vote for an atheist.

Prejudice in Politics
(Percent who would vote for each)

	Woman	Jew	Black	Atheist
	%	%	%	%
NATIONAL	82	89	79	44
Men	81	89	77	46
Women	83	90	81	42
Whites	81	89	77	46
Blacks	86	91	95	28
18-29 years	86	85	83	52
30-49 years	86	92	83	48
50-64 years	78	92	79	37
65 & older	73	86	64	31
College grads.	93	96	90	55
College inc.	86	92	78	49
High school grads.	76	89	77	45
Not H.S. grads.	76	82	73	29
East	84	89	80	54
Midwest	84	90	80	43
South	74	85	71	29
West	89	94	89	56

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